

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, NL
SUBJ: NETHERLANDS PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, MARCH 29

1. SUMMARY: POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE HAGUE WILL USE RESULTS OF THE UPCOMING PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS TO GAUGE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PRESENT CABINET. BECAUSE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PROVINCIAL BUSINESS AND NATIONAL ISSUES IS UNUSUALLY REMOTE, THE VOTE WILL LEND ITSELF EASILY TO DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, HAGUE POLITICAL FIGURES ARE PAYING GREAT ATTENTION TO THE OUTCOME.END SUMMARY

2. ELECTIONS FOR THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES WILL BE HELD MARCH 29. EACH OF THE ELEVEN DUTCH PROVINCES HAS A LEGISLATURE (47-83 SEATS BASED ON POPULATION), A PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE (OF SIX, ELECTED BY THE LEGISLATURE) AND A QUEEN'S COMMISSIONER (CHOSEN BY THE CABINET AND APPROVED BY THE QUEEN). PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ARE HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS (THE LAST IN 1974). EVERY THREE YEARS THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES ELECT ONE-HALF OF THE MEMBERS OF THE FIRST CHAMBER OF THE STATES GENERAL IN THE HAGUE. THUS, FIRST CHAMBER ELECTIONS ARE PREDETERMINED BY RESULTS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROVINCIAL VOTING THREE YEARS EARLIER.

3. VOTER INTEREST IN PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IS LOW COMPARED TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS LAST MAY. THE ONLY FORMAL CONNECTION BETWEEN PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES AND THE NATIONAL LEVEL IS THROUGH SELECTION OF POLITICALLY INEFFECTUAL FIRST CHAMBER. YET, BECAUSE THE 1977 NATIONAL ELECTIONS UNEXPECTEDLY PRODUCED BOTH A SOCIALIST

VICTORY AND A CENTER-RIGHT CABINET WITH BARE PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT, THERE IS MORE THAN THE USUAL NATIONAL INTEREST IN THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS. THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES ARE ANXIOUS TO DO AS WELL AS LAST YEAR, AND SO ARE THE OPPOSITION SOCIALISTS.

4. PROVINCIAL VOTING RESULTS (THEY ARE TALLIED ACCORDING TO PARTY LISTS) WILL BE IMMEDIATELY EXPRESSED BY POLITICIANS AND THE PRESS IN NUMBERS OF SEATS THE PARTIES WOULD HAVE WON IF THE ELECTIONS HAD BEEN FOR THE SECOND CHAMBER. NUMBERS OF SEATS WILL THEN BE COMPARED AGAINST SIMILAR CALCULATIONS FOR THE 1974 PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS AND THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS OF MAY 1977.

5. A LOSS BY CDA OR VVD PARTIES WILL TEND TO ACCENTUATE GROWING POLICY DISPUTES BETWEEN THEM.

THE VVD, FEELING THAT IT HAS BEEN FORCED TO GO ALONG WITH CDA PROGRAMS IN PARLIAMENT, HAS CRITICIZED THE CDA, ATTEMPTING TO REASSERT ITS OWN IDENTITY. CDA HAS LASHED BACK, REMINDING VVD THAT IT HAD AGREED DURING CABINET FORMATION TO GO ALONG WITH POLICIES WHICH THEY NOW SPEAK AGAINST. AN ATTEMPT BY BOTH SIDES DURING THE LAST TWO DAYS TO COOL THE ARGUMENTS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL. HOWEVER, THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER THIS WILL LAST BEYOND THE ELECTIONS.

6. IT LOOKS ALMOST LIKE MAY 1977. THE SAME POSTERS ARE UP, THE SAME CAMPAIGN RALLIES ARE BEING HELD, AND POLITICAL LEADERS ARE MAKING THE SAME TRIPS THROUGH THE PROVINCES. YET, IT IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DIFFERENT. POLITICAL LEADERS ARE USING PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, HELD FOR THE MORE LIMITED PURPOSE OF CHOOSING PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP TO PROVIDE A READ-OUT ON HOW WELL THE PUBLIC THINKS THE CDA/VVD CABINET IS FARING. BECAUSE THE CONNECTION IS INDIRECT, THERE WILL BE AMPLE ROOM FOR INTERPRETING ELECTION RESULTS. HOWEVER, THE FEELING PERSISTS THAT BOTH OPPOSITION AND GOVERNMENT HAVE BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THE OUTCOME THAN THEY HAD INTENDED ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO.
BROWN

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